**December Gardening Calendar**

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It is not too late to plant cyclamen, primula and petunias for winter color. Primula and cyclamen do best in the shade. Plant pansies and their cousins, the violas and johnny jump-ups, in the sun.

If you receive a dish of forced paperwhites as a holiday gift, move them to the flower garden or shrub border after you are finished with them in the house. If you don’t like the fragrance, that may mean you transplant them to the garden immediately!

Paperwhites naturalize in the South Texas landscape. Select a spot where they will get full or partial sun and plant them so the bulbs are covered. Do not remove the leaves until they brown naturally. As long as they are green, they are producing nutrients for the bulbs so that they can regrow next winter.

Paperwhites can even be planted in the lawn under deciduous trees if you are willing to let the foliage brown each year before mowing. Paperwhites provide green foliage and bloom in December or January each year. They are also deer-proof!

In the vegetable garden, plant onions (look for the new Texas Legend variety) and spinach transplants. If the tomatoes have made it through November, be ready to remove all full-sized fruit before the next freeze forecast. They will ripen in the house.

Consider a live holiday tree in a container. After you use it for the holidays, it can be planted in the landscape in full sun. Among those varieties that are sheared for use in the house and that can be planted outside, deodar cedar, Aleppo pine, Italian stone pine and Japanese black pine are most likely to prosper. Arizona cypress is usually not sheared, but it sometimes has an attractive enough natural shape to serve as a holiday tree and then can be planted outside.

The Virginia pine and loblolly pine are acid-loving trees that won’t last in the landscape. Afghan pine (*P.* e*ldarcia*) likes alkaline soil but is susceptible to a killing fungal dieback.

Sheared rosemary makes a good holiday tree for apartments or other locations requiring a small plant. They can then be placed outside in a container or in the ground in full sun.

December is a good month for planting other trees and shrubs, as well. Do not give specific trees and shrubs for holiday gifts unless you know for sure what the recipients want and need for their landscape. A better gift is a gift certificate from your gardener’s favorite nursery. With a gift certificate, they can select their own plants and pick up the gift when they have time to plant it.

If tulips are one of your favorite flowers, locate some pre-chilled bulbs at the nursery or buy them on the internet. They should be planted on or about January 1. Plant them in a sheltered location to protect them from the wind. They can be planted in morning sun.

You may also still be able to find bluebonnet transplants. Plant them in full sun for April blooms. Watch for caterpillars, and do not overwater them.

The American goldfinches should arrive this month. Attract them with thistle seed. Cardinals like safflower seed or sunflower seed. Suet blocks will attract the insect eaters including wrens, woodpeckers, blue jays, starlings and even some warblers.